

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 289 361

FL 017 075

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TITLE ESL Teacher Education. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics,
Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED),
Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Nov 87
CONTRACT 400-86-0019
NOTE 4p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis
Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Certification; Educational History; Educational
Trends; *English (Second Language); *Language
Teachers; Models; Professional Associations;
Professional Development; Second Language
Instruction; *Teacher Education; *Teacher Education
Programs; Teacher Qualifications
IDENTIFIERS *ERIC Digests; *Teachers of English to Speakers of
Other Languages

ABSTRACT

Although the teaching of English as a second language (ESL) is a relatively new profession, it is an old activity. Until World War II, ESL instruction in the United States was irregular. In 1940, the first ESL teachers enrolled in a University of Michigan training program based on structural or descriptive linguistics. The Army Language School began to expand the field of linguistics, and college linguistics programs also began to develop. The 1964 National Defense Education Act spurred the growth of ESL summer institutes and university training programs, and the newly-founded Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) developed guidelines for certification and training. Currently, 33 states and the District of Columbia have certification or endorsement requirements. Areas of necessary training for ESL teachers include English linguistics, anthropology, psychology, sociology, and education. Most of the existing training programs are at the graduate level, and many school systems provide in-service training. Since 1970, ESL teaching methodology has seen a shift from the teacher-centered to student-centered classroom, and teachers should be trained in a way that reflects this approach. New emphasis is being placed on the theory behind methodology, but in many other ways, training developments parallel those for other teachers. (MSE)

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ERIC Digest

ESL Teacher Education

Prepared by Carol Kreidler

November 1987

The Growing Profession

Although the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) is a relatively young profession, it is, in reality, quite an old activity. When the Angles and Saxons invaded Britain some 1500 years ago, the two tribes found it easier to teach their own language (which has evolved into present-day English) to the conquered Britons than to learn the Britons' tongue.

Until the time of World War II the teaching of English was rather hit or miss in the United States. Most immigrants found the lack of ability to speak English an occupational as well as a social and psychological handicap. Instruction in English for adult immigrants was provided in Americanization schools for those who wished to enroll, while public school children were required to do their studies in English with no extra help. There was no concentrated effort to aid non-English speakers.

In 1940, the first teachers of English as a foreign language were enrolled at the University of Michigan in a training program that was based on structural or descriptive linguistics. At about the same time in the Army Language School, the analysis of a variety of languages and their contrasts with the English language added to the expansion of the evolving field of linguistics. These developments in the study of languages, including the English language, gave impetus to the inauguration of programs in linguistics at colleges and universities. General linguistics programs often included classes or areas of concentration in applied linguistics which, at that time, were mainly programs of preparation for teaching English to speakers of other languages.

The Growing Number of Teacher Preparation Programs

In 1964 the National Defense Education Act authorized summer institutes to provide training for teachers of English as a second language (ESL), and the number of university programs in ESL grew. Forty-six programs in

36 institutions were described in a 1972 directory of TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) preparation programs; the 1986 edition of the directory lists 196 programs offered at 143 institutions.

The Growth of Certification

A milestone in professionalization occurred in 1966 with the founding of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), a professional organization for those concerned with the teaching of English as a second or foreign language. TESOL started with 337 members; today the organization numbers more than 11,000.

TESOL, in an attempt to address concerns of educators, held a conference (1970) to develop guidelines for certification and preparation of ESL teachers in the United States. These guidelines, which are in three parts, define the role of an ESL teacher in an American school, describe the personal qualities and professional competencies the teacher should possess, and describe the features of a professional preparation program designed to fulfill those competencies. They have been used extensively by the states in setting their requirements for certification.

From 1976 to 1980 the number of states offering some kind of certification in ESL increased almost five-fold, from 4 to 19. At present, 33 states and the District of Columbia have certification or endorsement and two states have pending certification legislation.

Special Preparation for ESL

It has been claimed that an English-speaking child has the ability to use most of the sounds and grammatical forms in a communicative context by the beginning of school. The content of training programs must, therefore, be different for those who will teach anyone who does not already know these forms. The teacher of ESL must know more than simply how to speak the language. Studies in English linguistics, anthropology, psy-

chology, and sociology, as well as in education, form the special areas of preparation for the ESL teacher.

Special Programs for ESL

Traditionally, the study of linguistics has been a graduate endeavor; likewise, programs for preparing teachers of ESL have usually been offered at the graduate level. Out of the 46 teacher preparation programs listed in the 1972 directory mentioned earlier, only five were at the bachelor's degree level, while 33 were at the master's level. The 1986 version of the directory lists 25 programs at the bachelor's level and 120 at the master's level. Professional preparation programs at one or both of these levels are in place for most states at state universities and/or private institutions.

The fact that most of the programs are graduate programs also accounts for the number of states that have endorsements for ESL rather than full certification since teachers often get their additional training in ESL adding endorsements to previous basic certification. Many school systems provide inservice training in ESL; moreover, the TESOL organization, through its affiliates and their conferences which offer Continuing Education Units, has taken the responsibility for a great deal of inservice ESL teacher education.

Some Future Directions

Since the 1970s, a change in teaching methodology that has pervaded the teaching of ESL is the change from a teacher-centered classroom to a student- or learner-centered classroom. In the learner-centered classroom the teacher becomes a facilitator of learning, and it is important that students in teacher preparation courses are taught in a manner that reflects this approach to learning.

Teacher preparation programs are presently being challenged to produce teachers who understand the theory behind the methodologies. Freeman (1987) points out that the teacher trainer's first task is to find out how people learn to teach, to understand the processes through which individuals learn to be language teachers. Only then can we concentrate our efforts on improving the quality of language teacher education.

But teachers of ESL are, above all, teachers. New directions in ESL preparation parallel new directions in the preparation of all teachers. In education today there is discussion regarding the amount of time prospective teachers spend learning how to teach rather than learning the content of what they will teach. Prospective teachers of ESL are in this way like those of other fields. For years the emphasis has been on the learner in the classroom; now we are beginning to see more emphasis on the teacher. After all, the teacher is a crucial determiner of success in the classroom.

Resources

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) is a membership organization that publishes a bimonthly newsletter, a quarterly journal, and other publications. In addition to the previously mentioned Guidelines for Certification, the TESOL organization has also published standards for professional preparation programs. The address for TESOL is Suite 205, 1118 22nd St. NW, Washington, DC 20037.

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